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Grand Forks City Hall  
404 Second Avenue North  
Grand Forks  
Grand Forks County  
North Dakota

HABS No. ND-21

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

Name: Grand Forks City Hall

Location: 404 Second Avenue North (Front facade faces south on Second Avenue North; and is located on the northwest corner of Second Avenue North and Fourth Street North)  
Grand Forks  
Grand Forks County  
North Dakota

Present Owner: City of Grand Forks

Present Occupant and Use: City offices: Mayor, Assessor, Auditor, City Planning Department, Permits and Department of Inspections; Water and Sewage Department, City Engineer, City Council Chamber, meeting rooms.

Significance: The City Hall is one of four surviving Classical Revival buildings constructed in Grand Forks, the County seat of Grand Forks County, between 1900-1920. In style and material, the City Hall conforms to Central High School (1917) directly across Second Avenue North which faces Fourth Street, and to the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse (Federal Building) across from Central High School facing Fourth Street North, which was designed by James Knox Taylor in 1906. These three buildings represent the "City Beautiful" movement in architecture and form a visual focus to the public area of the Central Business District reflecting the City's regional importance to a vast agricultural hinterland in the Red River Valley at the turn of the century.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

##### A. Physical History

Date of Erection: 1911 (cornerstone and plaque on foyer wall). Permit entered in Book 1, Permit Index on February, 1913, p. 88: original cost \$82,000 on Block 14, Lots 9-11, Original Townsite.

Architect: John W. Ross (plaque on foyer wall)

John W. Ross was a Grand Forks architect who practiced in the City of Grand Forks, eastern North Dakota, and northern Minnesota between the 1890's and 1940. He built many elegant private homes, business blocks, churches, and public buildings during his career. His work included many of Grand Forks' school buildings, as well as schools in Minto, Hillsboro, and Williston, North Dakota. He also designed the Grand Forks Woolen Mills (1895), Grand Forks and Cass County hospitals, Traill, Wells, and Cavalier County Courthouses. He was often employed to superintend the building construction. By 1940, his practice, J. W. Ross and Son, included his son William Ross. (Taken from Dudley 1897:85-6; and Grand Forks City Directories, 1895-1940, Pettibone Co., Grand Forks, ND).

Builder: Northern Construction and Engineering Co. (plaque on foyer wall)

Alterations: The building is substantially original, with no major additions. Minor alterations are: 1) Glass windows and anodized aluminum frames on first and second story windows replacing one-over-one double hung original windows, and glass bricks in basement windows; 2) Glass and aluminum enclosed front entry and metal canopy in front arched entry; 3) Interior alterations to basement hallway and rooms (1981); and 4) lighting and carpeting to offices and central stairway.

B. Historical Context: The City Hall has always housed City offices since its completion in 1911. It replaced the first and original City Hall built in 1885, and located on the corner of Third Street and University Avenue. The present City Hall was constructed during the tenure of Hon. M.F. Murphy (1910-1914), and has housed 14 mayoral administrations to the present date (see Bladow 1974:44).

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

### A. Description of Exterior:

The building is two full stories above grade over a half basement, and has a flat parapeted roof. The principal (2nd Ave. N.) and Fourth Street North facades are symmetrical in design. The style is Beaux-Arts Classicism.

The principal (2nd Ave. N.) facade has three bays and measures approximately 80 feet. The two end bays, approximately 15 feet wide, are slightly jutting. The central bay contains a slightly jutting front entry with a smooth cut limestone central rounded arch sloping toward the entrance in a voussoir pattern. Above the central arch at the second story is a central double pedimented window separated by a pilaster strip and flanked by paired fluted shafts topped by Roman Ionic capitals. The architrave is smooth-surfaced limestone under a bracketed frieze, inscribed "City Hall". A balustraded parapet surmounts the building on the 2nd Avenue North and 4th Street North facades, and is decorated with a large cartouche on the principal facade.

The 4th Street North facade is symmetrical in design with three bays. End bays of 15 feet in width are slightly jutting with a recessed central bay on approximately 50 feet. The central bay contains two double windows flanked by a single window at each end.

The building is faced with cream yellow brick and cut limestone; the basement is sheathed in cut limestone. The building is constructed of wall bearing masonry with reinforced concrete beams and floor slabs.

The Grand Forks City Hall is composed of four horizontal zones. The basement story walls are of smooth-faced cut limestone surmounted by a limestone sill course. Basement windows have no surrounds. The second zone is articulated by the first story windows surmounted by another limestone sill course. On the first floor, this zone is faced with yellow cream brick, limestone window sills with no surrounds, and segmented brick lintels. The stretcher bond brick pattern has one recessed course of brick every 7 brick courses repeated 7 times. The third zone is the second story. The second story is faced with yellow brick accented by cut limestone corner quoins at the end bays and limestone Renaissance Revival window surrounds. The fourth zone is composed of the balustraded parapet, of alternating balusters and piers with raised panels continuing vertically the pattern of alternating solids and voids. A central cartouche projects above the balustrade at the center of the principal facade.

The west and north (rear) side of the building is less elaborate. The building is faced with yellow cream brick. Second story windows have limestone keystones. The west facade is accentuated by a limestone basement and sill course between the first and second stories. This side contains a flat brick chimney from the boiler room. The balustrade continues 15 feet down the jutting front bay on this side. The rear of the building is similar to the west side. However, the parapet extends only three feet down this side, and the basement is yellow brick.

B. Description of Interior:

The interior plan is a central square hallway around rooms on the four perimeters. The foyer on the ground level opens to a central half story stairway to the first floor with two end stairwells to the basement. The central stairway is ornate iron balusters trimmed with oak bannisters. The stairway to the second floor is offset to the east (4th Street North) side. Door surrounds on the basement floor are white marble as is the wainscoting on the basement and first floor. Oak surrounds characterize the first floor. Walls and ceilings are smooth plaster. The foyer is white and black terrazo tile. Floors are stone.

C. Site:

The City Hall is situated on the northwest corner of Second Avenue North and Fourth Street North. Buildings nearly abut the structure on the west and north (rear) side with a scout ten foot clearance. The City Hall is on the sidewalk and no shrubbery or plantings surround the site. No obstacles obstruct the view of City Hall from the west, east, north, or south.

## PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

1. Bibliography:

Bladow, Eldon, exec. ed. They Came to Stay, Grand Forks, North Dakota Centennial 1874-1974.  
1974 Jet Printing, Inc., Grand Forks, p. 44.

Dudley, William L.  
1897 City of Grand Forks Illustrated. Grand Forks, North Dakota.  
The Herald, Printers and Binders, p. 85-6.

Permit Index, Book I, p. 88. City Hall entry under  
"February 13"

Pettibone Directory Co., Publishers  
1895-1940 Grand Forks - East Grand Forks City Directory. Grand  
Forks, North Dakota

Polk Co.  
1895-1940 Grand Forks City Directory  
St. Paul, Minnesota

2. Architectural Drawings: On file: City Engineers Office, City Hall.
3. Early View: In Bladow 1974, p. 44.
4. Likely Sources not investigated: Grand Forks Herald files, Grand Forks, ND.
5. Supplemental Material: Attached.

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